

# Blandin Foundation 2013 Rural Pulse™ Foundation Home Area Research

May 2013



Blandin Foundation™  
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

RUSSELL  
HERDER



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## **Project Goal and Objectives**

Rural Pulse™ is a research study that has been commissioned by the Blandin Foundation since 1998 to gain a real-time snapshot of the concerns, perceptions and priorities of rural Minnesota residents. This initiative was last conducted in 2010 and served to identify trends within significant, complex subject areas including the economy, education, employment and quality of life. Past studies have also included canvassing opinions within the Foundation's "home" area as well as among Blandin Community Leadership and Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program alumni.

The Foundation chose to undertake this effort again in 2013 to accomplish the following objectives:

- Understand the issues rural residents and leaders prioritize within their communities;
- Learn if community needs are being adequately addressed;
- Compare and contrast issue movement in comparison to past Rural Pulse studies; and, new for 2013,
- Gain an understanding of how the opinions of urban Minnesotans and those of ethnic and cultural differences compare to at-large findings.

The Blandin Foundation also is providing an urban dimension to this year's study, made possible through support from the Minnesota Community Foundation.

## Methodology

Independent research and communications consultant Russell Herder was retained to conduct this study. The survey instrument for Rural Pulse™ 2013 was developed in cooperation with Blandin Foundation leadership. Where possible and relevant, certain questions from past studies were repeated for comparison purposes.

Telephone interviews were conducted with rural Minnesotans March 7-15. A random sample of landline and wireless phone numbers across Minnesota was purchased for use in this study, excluding the seven-county Twin Cities metro area and those in zip codes with populations of 35,000 or more. The resulting total of 1,017 rural residents provides a statistical reliability of +/-3.2 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

The survey was also administered via e-mail to alumni of the Blandin Community Leadership Program and the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program between March 29 and April 8. A total of 560 surveys were completed for a statistical reliability of +/-4.3 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

To assess the Blandin Foundation's home area – defined as the Grand Rapids and Itasca County area, including the communities of Blackduck, Hill City, Northome and Remer – a total of 335 telephone interviews were completed March 16-28, reflecting a statistical reliability of +/-5.5 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

New to Rural Pulse for 2013 was a study conducted among Minnesota residents within the seven-county metro area, as well as cities with a population of more than 35,000. Telephone interviews were conducted March 19-April 1 with 549 urban residents, providing a statistical reliability of +/-4.4 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

Also new in 2013 was an oversample study conducted March 23-April 30 with cultural groups within rural Minnesota, inclusive of African-American, Asian, Native American, Hispanic/Latino and immigrants (e.g., Hmong, Somali, Southeast Asian), as well as multi-cultural individuals. A total of 388 surveys were collected.

All completed questionnaires were processed and analyzed using SPSS software. The data was sorted by gender, age, income, region and business ownership, and weighted to reflect state demographics.

## Findings

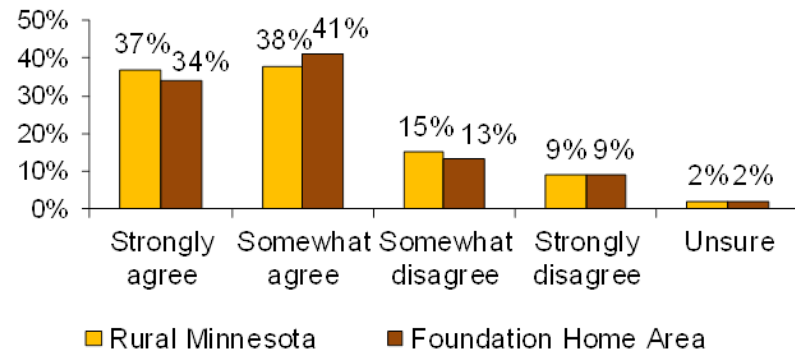
Note: The following analysis reflects findings from the Blandin Foundation home area with a comparison of significant differences to rural Minnesota results. The “home” geographical area is defined as the Grand Rapids and Itasca County area, including the communities of Blackduck, Hill City, Northome and Remer.

## Perspective on Community

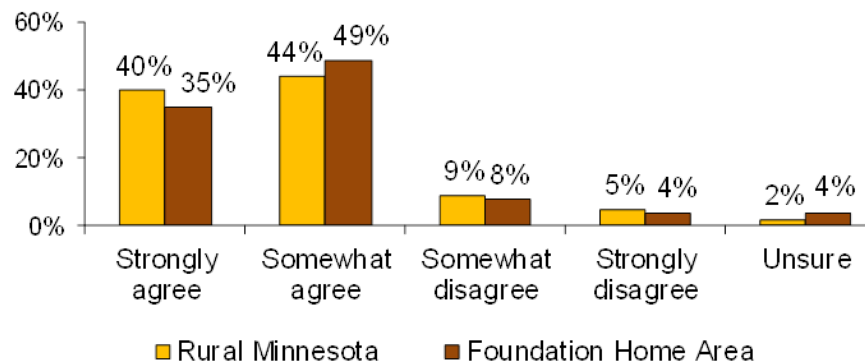
Three in four Foundation Home Area respondents said that they believe their community is a vibrant place to live and work, while 22 percent did not agree.

An even greater proportion (84%) believed their community is strong, resilient and able to recover from difficult situations. Twelve percent did not agree.

### My Community is a Vibrant Place to Live and Work



### My Community is Strong, Resilient and Able to Recover from Difficult Situations

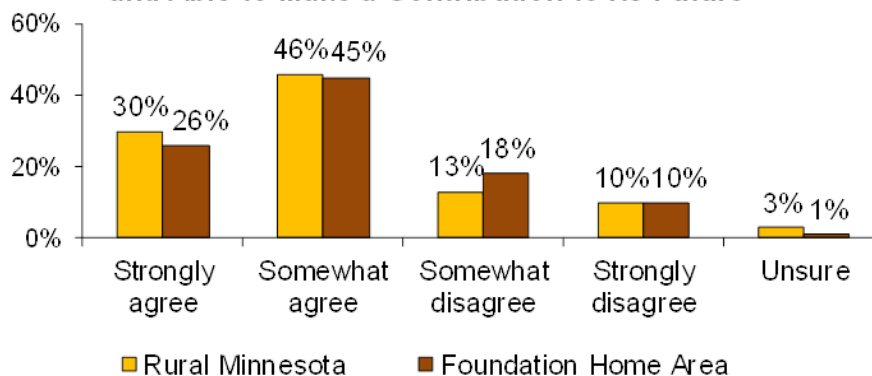


## Personal Influence Surrounding Change

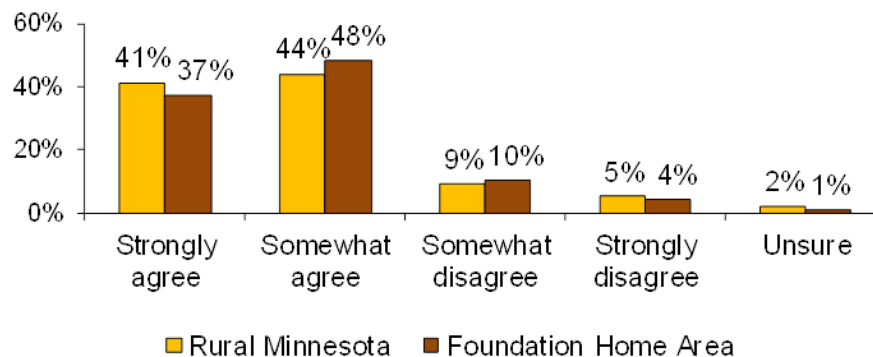
While residents expressed some concern about the economy and quality of life in their local community, they were optimistic about their ability to personally impact change. Those surveyed were asked whether they feel a sense of ownership over the direction of their community and whether they are able to make a contribution to its future. Seven in 10 (71%) agreed, while 28 percent did not.

Those surveyed were asked whether they felt that people like themselves are able to make an impact and improve local quality of life. Eighty-five percent said they could, with only 14 percent believing that they do not have the ability to influence change.

**Feel Sense of Ownership Over Community Direction, and Able to Make a Contribution to Its Future**



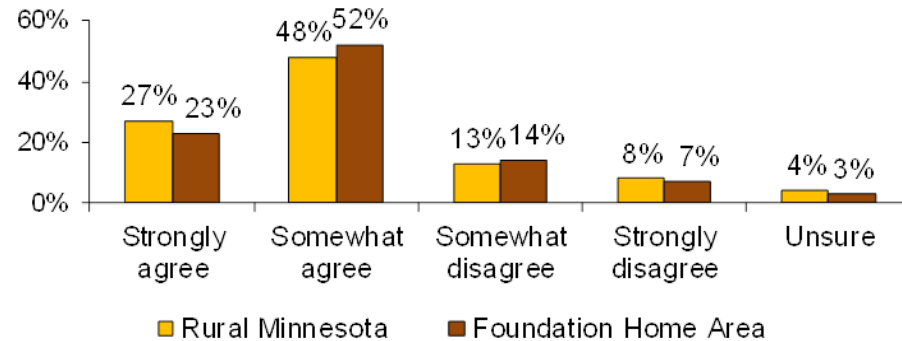
**People Like Me are Able to Make an Impact and Make My Community a Better Place to Live**



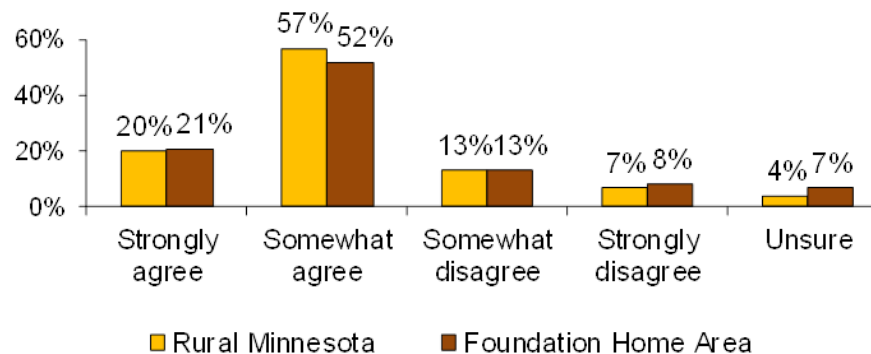
When asked whether they feel local community members work well together, however, confidence was not as strong. About one in five (21%) said that they do not feel their community works together cohesively, compared to 75 percent who said that they feel it does.

When asked if they believe their community is able to work across differences, nearly three in four (73%) agreed, while one in five (21%) said they did not.

**Residents in My Community Work Together Effectively to Address Local Issues**



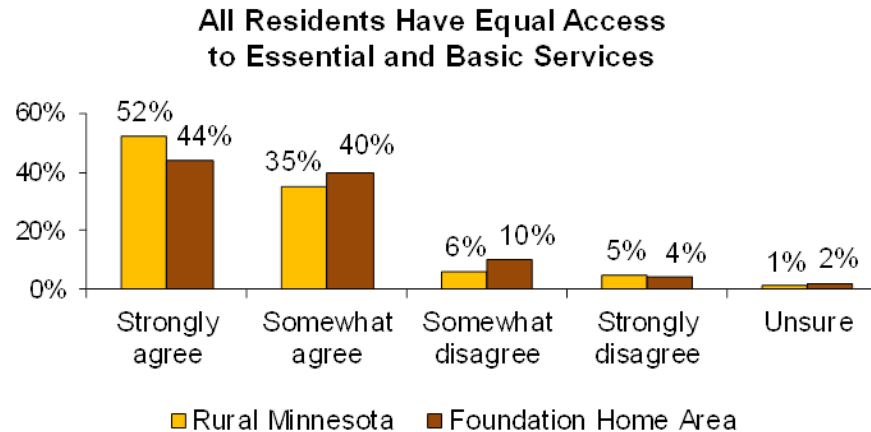
**My Community is Able to Work Across Differences**





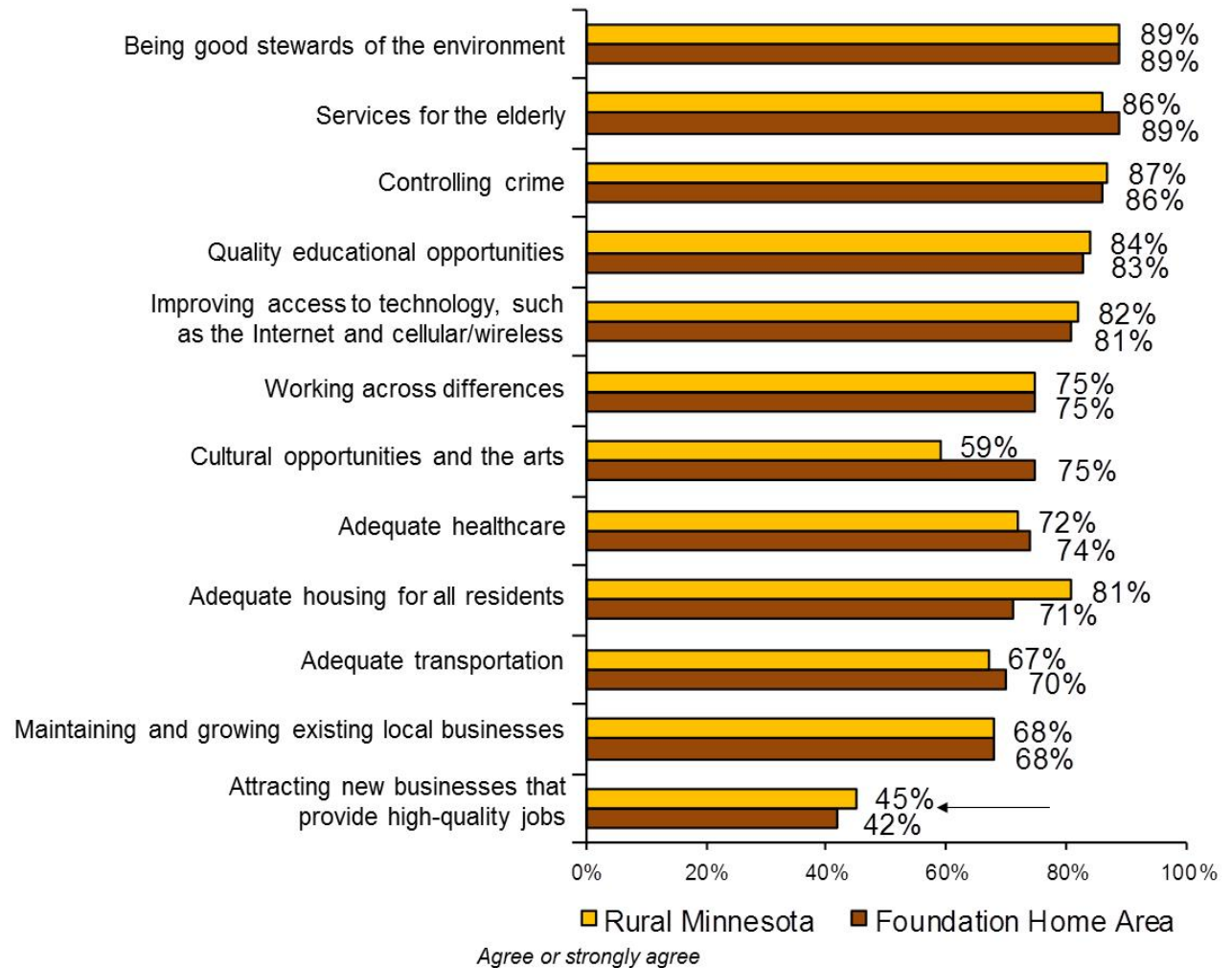
## Confidence in Service Quality, Access Continues

Most Foundation Home Area residents (84%) believed that their community offers equal access to essential services, a sentiment that was felt slightly more strongly with rural Minnesotans overall.



## Snapshot: Community Performance

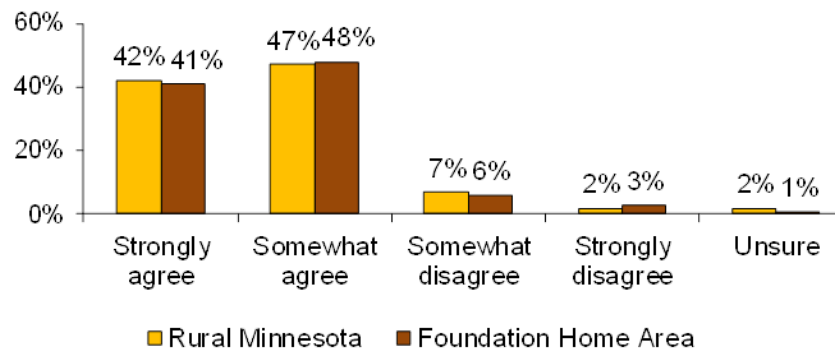
Foundation Home Area residents were asked to evaluate several critical dimensions of their area. The most highly rated were environmental stewardship, services for the elderly, crime control, education and improving access to technology. They gave the lowest ratings for attracting new businesses that provide ample living-wage jobs. Other issues mentioned that residents considered important to the local area included taxes, spending and governance, tourism, youth opportunities and drug abuse.



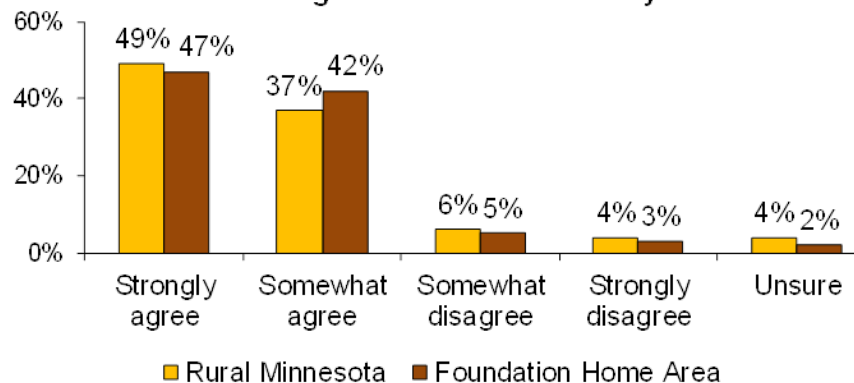
## The Environment, Services for the Elderly and Controlling Crime

About nine in 10 (89%) Foundation Home Area residents said they believe their community to be a good steward of the environment, nearly identical to rural Minnesota results overall. The majority (89%) also said they have confidence in their community's ability to provide services for the elderly.

**My Community is a Good Steward of the Environment**



**My Community Does a Good Job Providing Services to the Elderly**

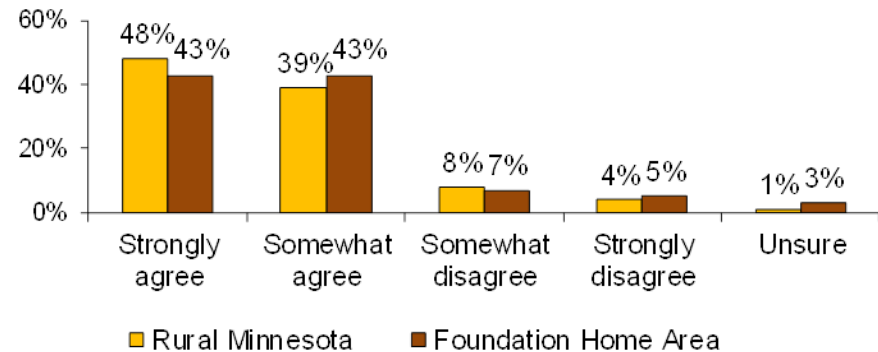


Most (86%) also said that they have confidence in their community's ability to control crime.

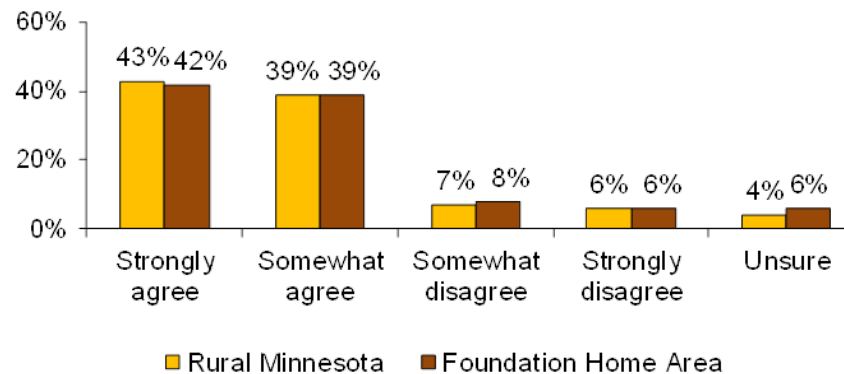
### Technology

About four in five (81%) Foundation Home Area residents felt their community does an acceptable job at improving access to such technology as Internet and wireless services. Forty-two percent strongly agreed and 39 percent somewhat agreed that their community has improved access to technology, with 14 percent disagreeing. These findings were nearly identical to those of rural Minnesotans at large.

### My Community Does a Good Job Controlling Crime



### My Community Does a Good Job Improving Access to Technology



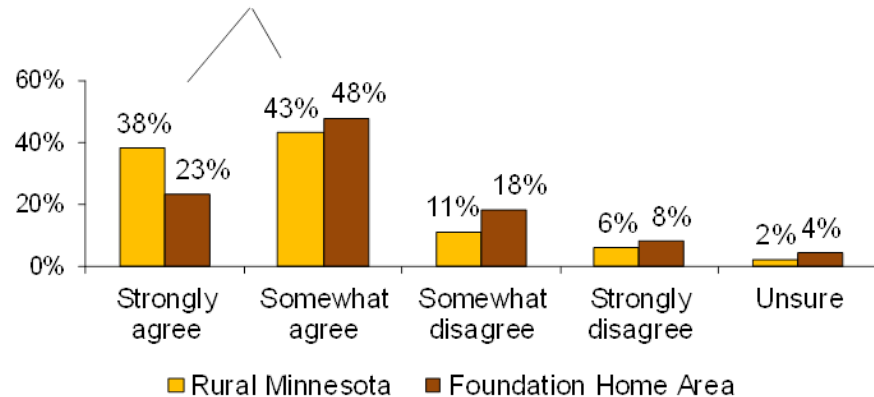
## Housing and Transportation

Although seven in 10 (71%) Foundation Home Area residents agreed that there is sufficient housing in their community, 26 percent were concerned about adequate availability, showing higher disagreement than rural Minnesotans overall (17%).

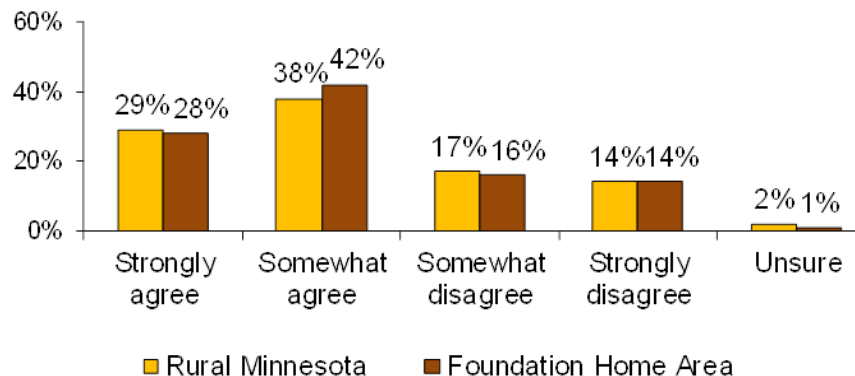
Transportation was a concern for nearly one in three Foundation Home Area residents. While seven in 10 agreed that their community provides adequate transportation opportunities, 30 percent did not feel this is the case.

### My Community Provides Adequate Housing

71% Foundation Home Area  
vs. 81% Rural Minnesota



### My Community Provides Adequate Transportation



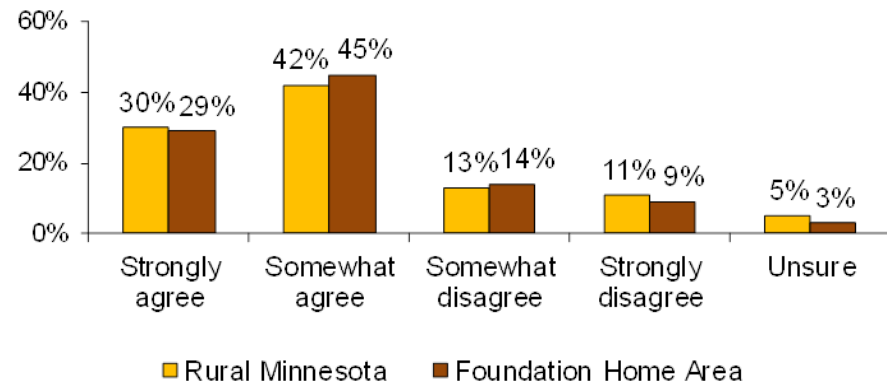
## Healthcare

Healthcare was a concern for nearly one in four residents in the Foundation Home Area. While three in four (74%) agreed that their community provides adequate healthcare opportunities, 23 percent did not feel that this is the case.

## Culture and the Arts

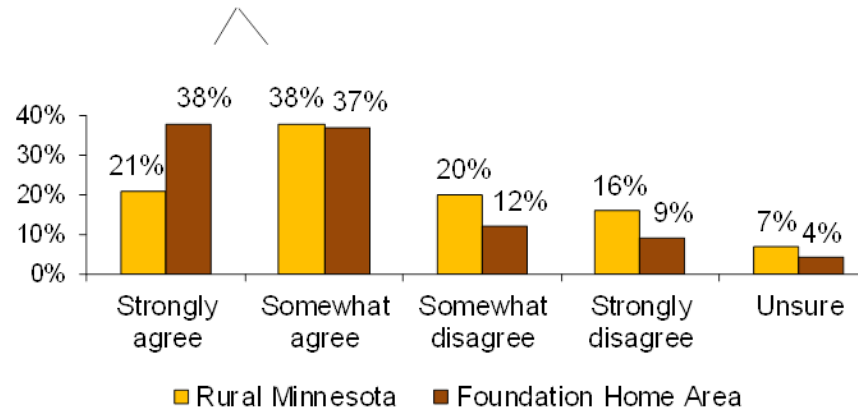
Foundation Home Area residents were much more likely than rural residents at large (75% vs. 59%) to have said that the availability of cultural and arts opportunities is adequate in their community, although it was a concern for one in five (21%).

### My Community Provides Adequate Healthcare Opportunities



### My Community Does a Good Job Providing Cultural Opportunities and the Arts

75% Foundation Home Area  
vs. 59% Rural Minnesota

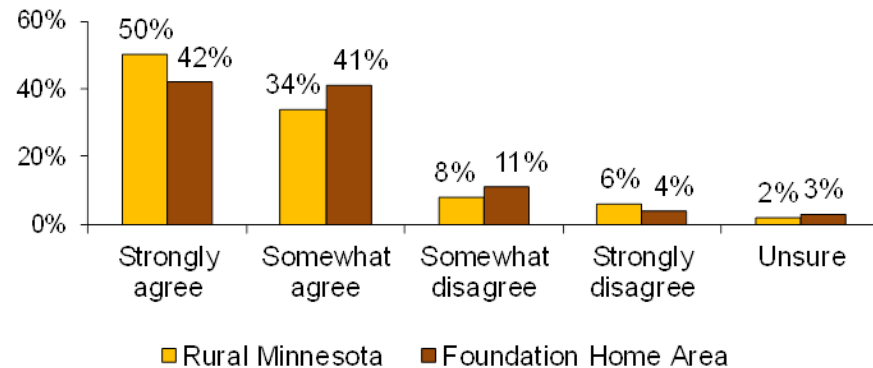


## Education

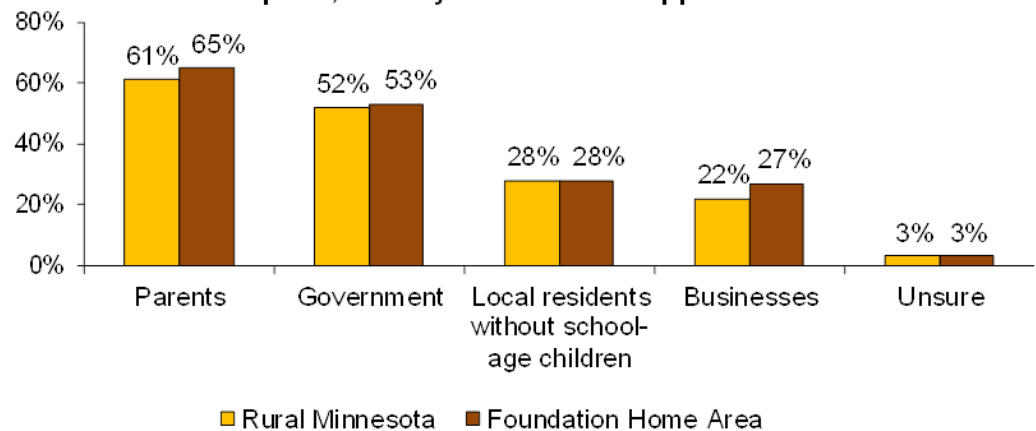
The majority (83%) of Foundation Home Area respondents believed their community provides quality educational opportunities, with 42 percent strongly agreeing and 41 percent somewhat agreeing. Fifteen percent disagreed that their community provides adequate educational opportunities.

When asked who they feel is responsible for ensuring that adequate, quality educational opportunities are available in their community, two-thirds (65%) said they feel it is up to parents. About half (53%) also believed the government should be involved in such support. Twenty-eight percent of Foundation Home Area respondents felt local residents without school-age children should play a role in assisting with this effort, while 27 percent also named business owners.

### My Community Provides Adequate Educational Opportunities



### Who is Responsible for Ensuring Adequate, Quality Educational Opportunities



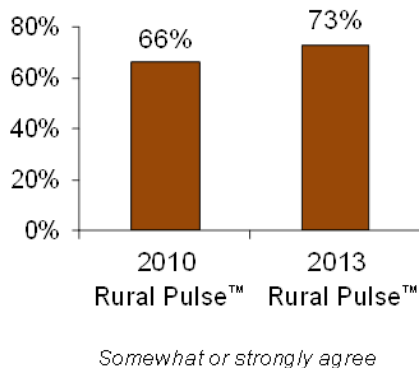
*Multiple responses allowed*

## Optimism Surrounds Quality of Life

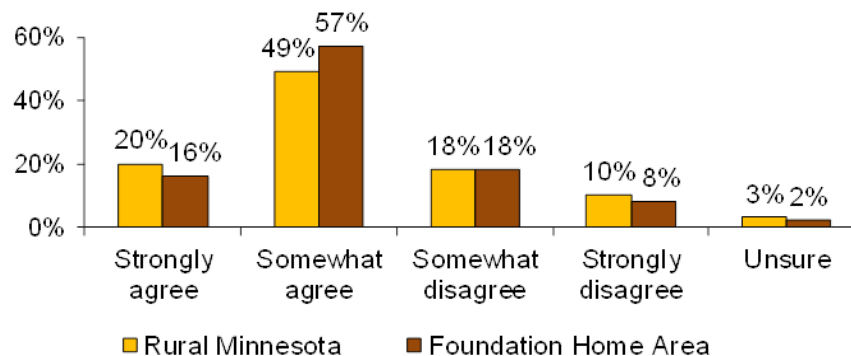
Foundation Home Area residents were queried about their community's quality of life. More than seven in 10 (73%) felt quality of life would improve over the next five years, while 26 percent predicated that it would not. This represents a positive upturn from 2010.

When asked how optimistic they feel about their community's future, three in four (76%) Foundation Home Area respondents felt positive, while 21 percent did not share that sentiment. Rural Minnesotans overall expressed slightly higher cynicism (28%) than those in Itasca County.

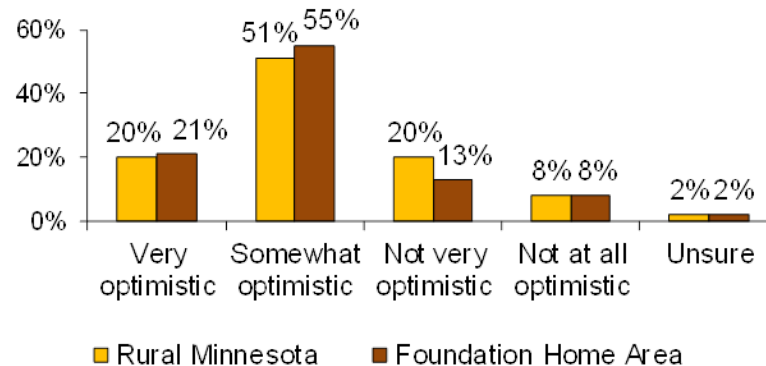
**Quality of Life Will Improve Over Next Five Years**



**Quality of Life Will Improve Over Next Five Years**



**Optimism About Community's Future**



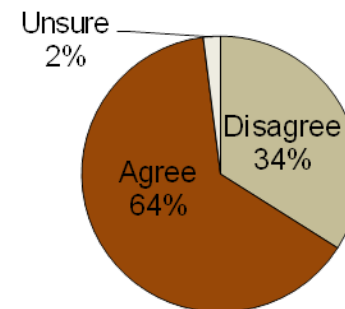


## Rural Voice

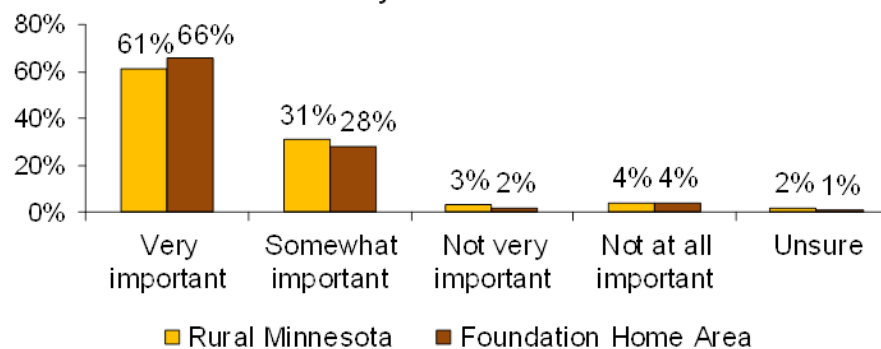
Foundation Home Area residents expressed concern about the priority placed upon their interests. When asked if the needs and well-being of rural Minnesota communities are as important to legislators and policymakers as those of metropolitan cities, a third (34%) were of the opinion that they are not. Sixty-four percent were comfortable that their voice is being heard. These were nearly identical findings to those of rural Minnesotans overall.

Ninety-four percent of Foundation Home Area respondents said it is important to support political candidates who actively address rural issues.

**The Needs and Well-Being of Rural Minnesota Communities are as Important to Legislators and Policymakers**



**Importance of Supporting Political Candidates Who Actively Address Rural Issues**



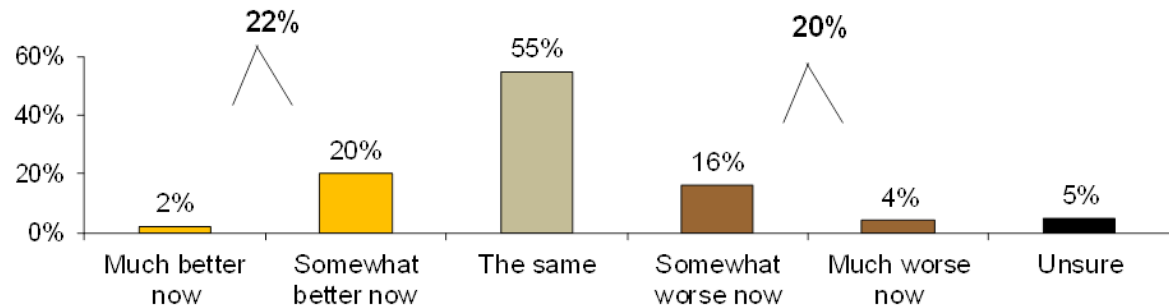
## Economic Concerns Persist, But Show Slight Progression

Survey participants were asked to gauge the condition of their community's economy now as compared to a year ago.

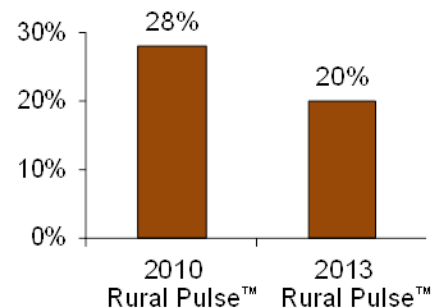
Twenty-two percent of Foundation Home Area respondents said that they felt it had improved, 55 percent believed it stayed the same, and 20 percent indicated that their local economy had worsened over the last year.

These findings were nearly identical to rural Minnesotans overall. Belief that the economic condition had declined was eight percent lower than opinions expressed by Foundation Home Area residents in Rural Pulse 2010, however.

Condition of Local Economy Compared to One Year Ago



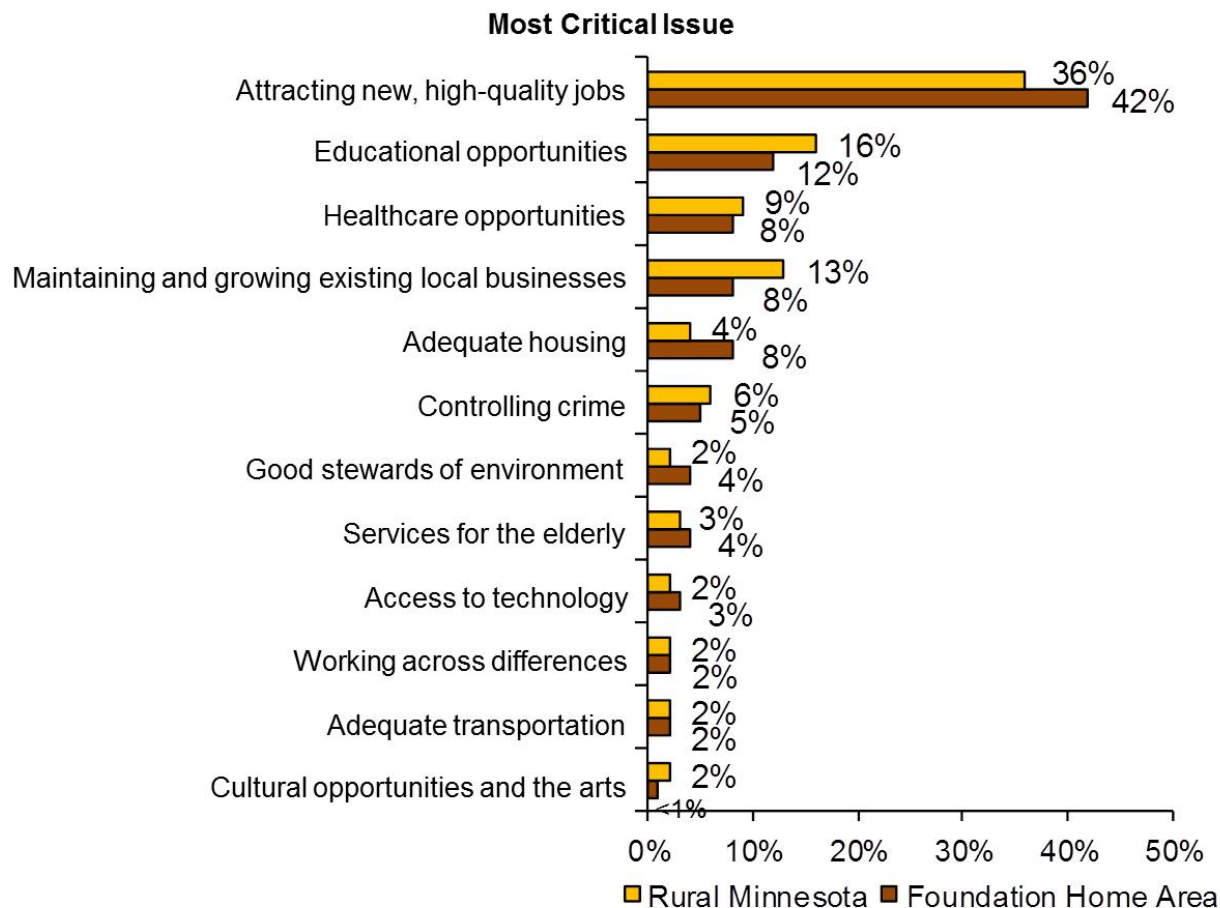
Local Economy Has Declined Compared to One Year Ago



*Somewhat or much worse now*

## Critical Issues for Rural Communities

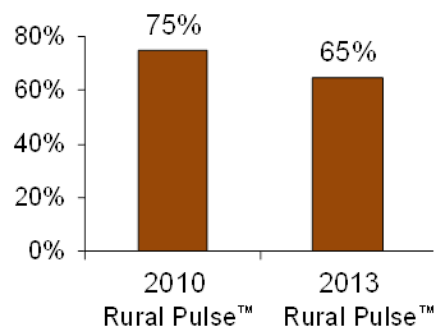
The need for attracting new, high-quality jobs continues to be considered the top priority by 42 percent of Foundation Home Area residents, a slightly higher percentage than rural Minnesotans overall. The next most important issue was educational opportunities (12%).



## Jobs Concerns Still High

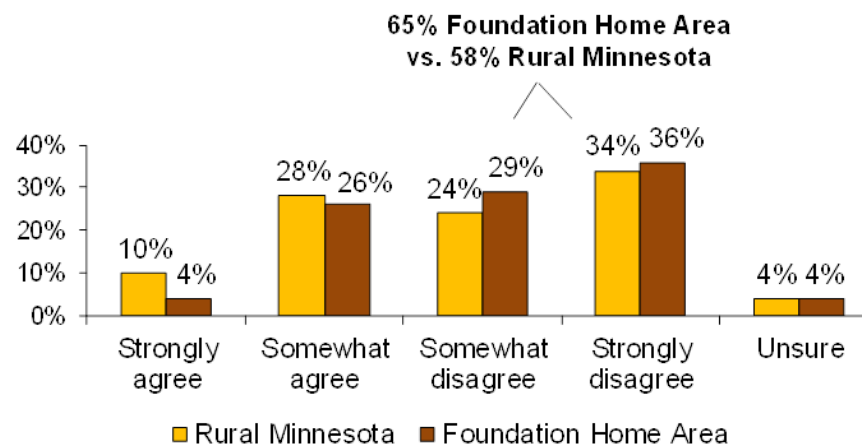
Although concern that there are adequate jobs paying household-supporting wages decreased 10 percentage points since Rural Pulse™ 2010, there is still a lack of confidence in the job market. About two-thirds (65%) of Foundation Home Area residents felt that there are not adequate living-wage job opportunities in their community, a higher dissatisfaction than indicated by rural residents overall.

### Do Not Believe That There are Adequate Jobs Paying Household-Supporting Wages



*Somewhat or strongly disagree that there are adequate jobs that pay household-supporting wages*

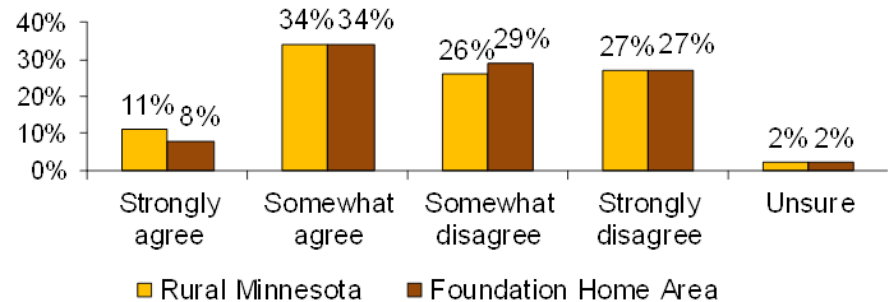
### There are an Adequate Number of Jobs in My Community that Pay Household-Supporting Wages



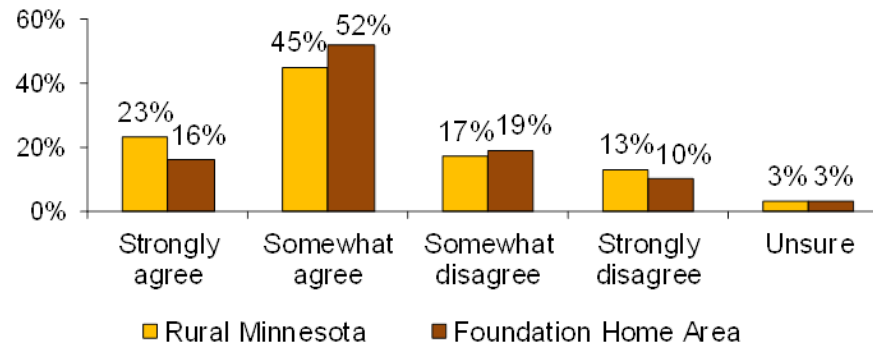
Along with the concern over adequate job opportunities, more than half (56%) of Foundation Home Area respondents believed that their community does not do enough to draw new businesses that provide high-quality jobs. Only 42 percent felt comfortable with their community's ability to attract new industry, a sentiment that has not deviated much from 2010.

In addition, nearly one in three (29%) said they feel that their area lacks the ability to maintain and grow existing businesses, although many Foundation Home Area respondents believed that their community does a much better job of maintaining and growing existing business than it does attracting new industry (68% vs. 42%).

**My Community Does a Good Job  
Attracting New Businesses that Provide High-Quality Jobs**



**My Community Does a Good Job  
Maintaining and Growing Existing Local Businesses**

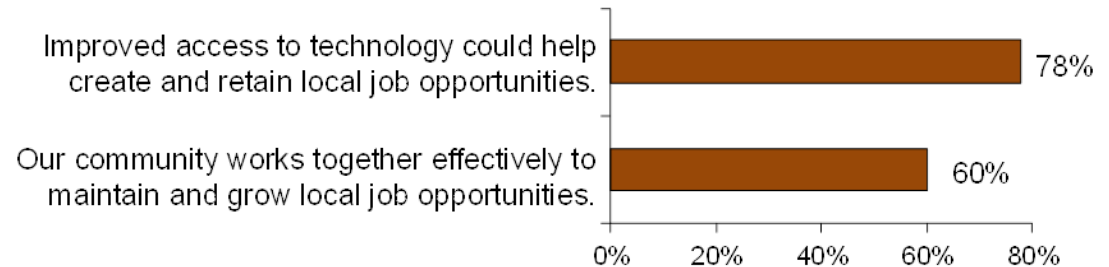


## Job Growth Resources

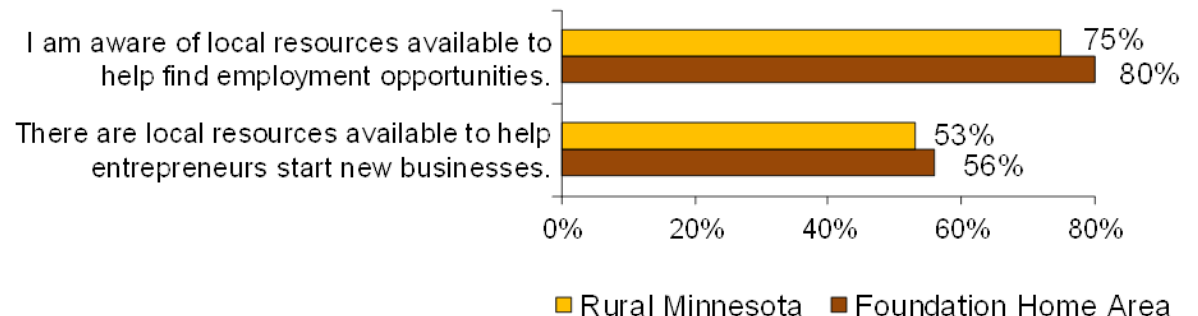
Nearly four in five (78%) Foundation Home Area residents said they feel improved access to technology could assist in the creation and retention of jobs, although skepticism exists whether their community is able to work together to address job growth, with two in five disagreeing that their community effectively collaborates to grow the local job base. These findings nearly mirrored those of rural Minnesotans overall.

Although four in five Foundation Home Area residents said they are aware of local resources to assist residents in finding jobs, 44 percent said they are unaware of resources available to help entrepreneurs start new businesses. Rural Minnesotans at large were slightly more likely to have shown awareness of job growth resources.

### Opinions on Local Job Growth



### Awareness of Local Job Growth Resources

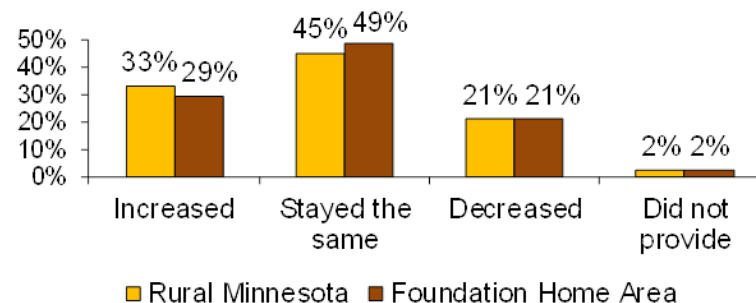


## Impact of the Economy on Households

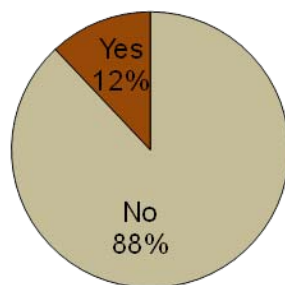
While three in 10 (29%) Foundation Home Area residents said that their household income has increased over the past year, many households are still struggling with a decrease in wages (21%). About half (49%) said their household income had not changed in the past 12 months.

More specifically, 12 percent said that someone in their home has lost a job within the past year, identical results to rural Minnesotans overall and a three-percentage-point decrease from 2010 findings.

**Change in Household Income Over Past Year**



**Job Loss within Household  
In the Past Year**

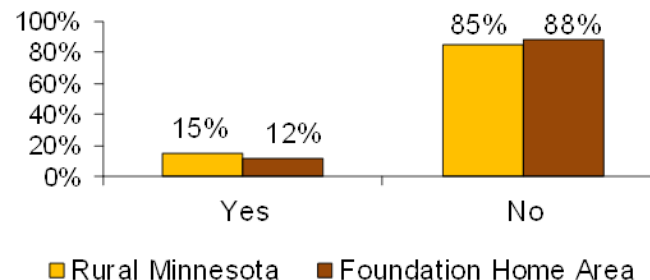


## Migration

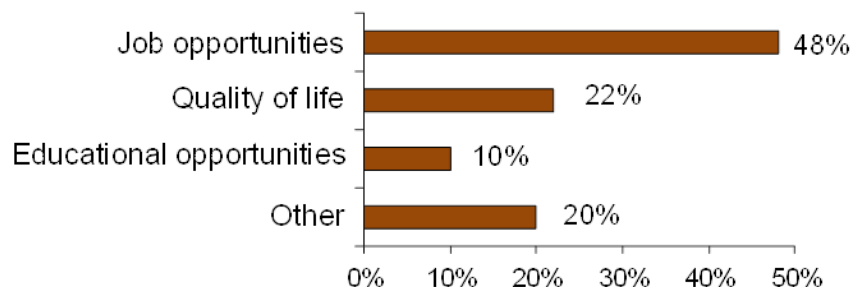
Twelve percent of Foundation Home Area respondents indicated that they have considered leaving their community for a larger city/metro area within the past two years. Of those who have considered a move, nearly half (48%) said it would be to pursue job opportunities. Quality of life was cited as the main factor for 22 percent of those responding, followed by educational opportunities (10%). These were nearly identical findings to that of rural Minnesotans overall. Other responses included being closer to family or other personal reasons.

Looking forward, one in 10 Foundation Home Area residents said that they do not expect to be living in their current locale five years from now and another two percent were undecided.

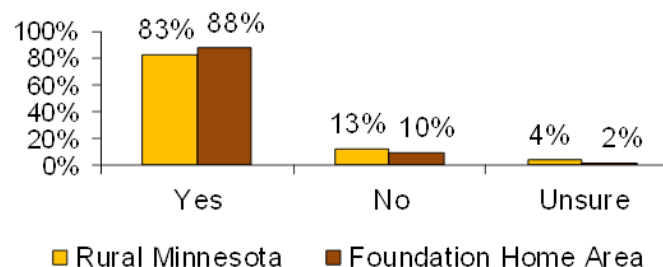
### Considered Moving to Larger City or Metropolitan Area Within Last Two Years



### Main Reason for Considering Moving to Larger City or Metropolitan Area



### Expect to Live in Same Community Five Years from Now



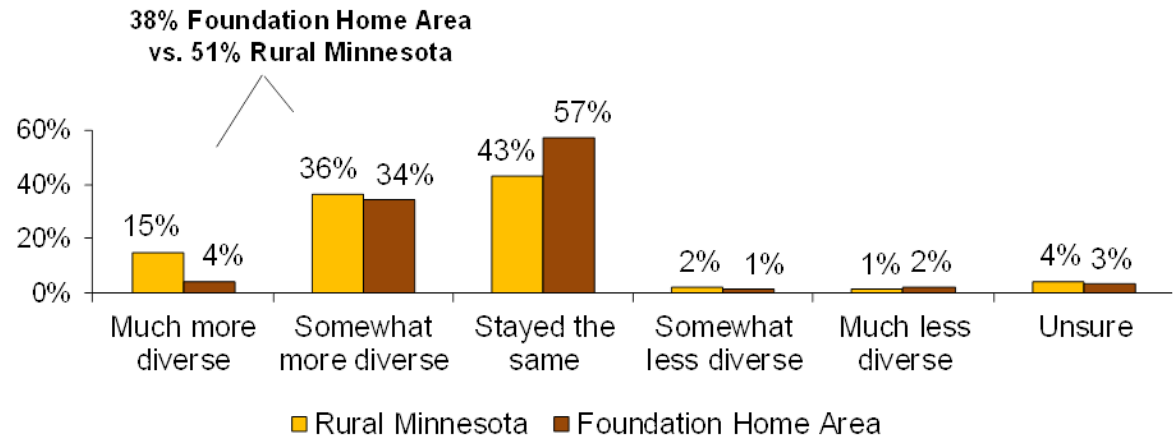


## A Changing Landscape

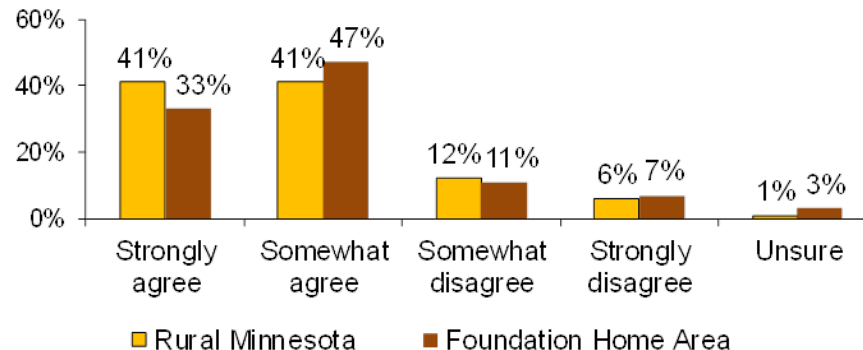
Foundation Home Area residents were less likely than rural residents overall (38% Foundation Home Area, 51% overall) to feel their community's ethnic or racial makeup has become more diverse over the past five years. Fifty-seven percent felt it has stayed the same.

Though there is some belief that diversity is increasing in the Foundation Home Area, 18 percent did not feel their community is welcoming to people of varying backgrounds and perspectives. Four in five, however, said that they feel their community is inviting, although that was felt more strongly among rural residents overall.

### My Community's Ethnic or Racial Make-Up Has Become More Diverse Over The Past Five Years



### My Community is a Welcoming Place for People of All Backgrounds and Perspectives

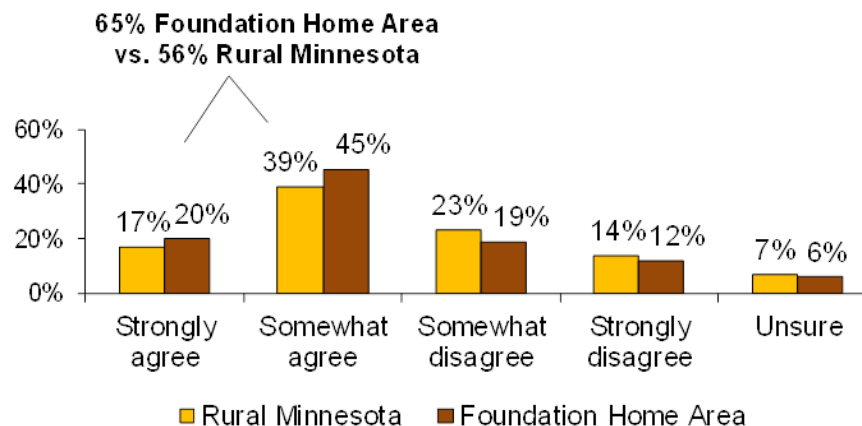


## Leadership Distribution

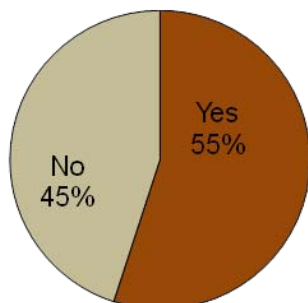
Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Foundation Home Area residents said that they feel local community leadership is comprised of people from different backgrounds, which was higher than that of rural Minnesotans overall (56%). Thirty-one percent of Foundation Home Area residents and 37 percent of rural Minnesotans at large felt that inclusiveness in leadership roles is lacking.

Interestingly, while many Foundation Home Area residents said that they believe that leadership in their community is inclusive, 45 percent said that they have not served in a leadership role, whether it be youth sports, city government or with a local nonprofit organization in the past.

### People from Different Backgrounds Fill Leadership Roles Within My Community



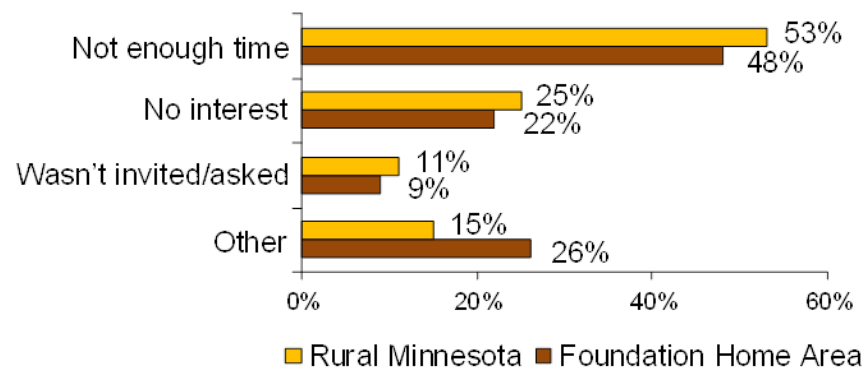
### Served in a Leadership Role



Nearly half (48%) of local residents who had not served as a leader said that the main reason was lack of time. Twenty-two percent said they would have no interest in serving in a leadership capacity. About one in 10 (9%) have never been invited to participate as a leader. Another 26 percent cited other reasons, such as being new to the area, age or a disability, among others.

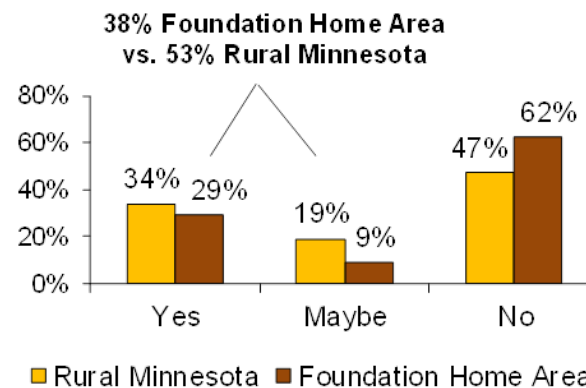
Although many had not served in a leadership role within their community to date, there was interest in doing so. Three in 10 (29%) indicated that they would be interested in being invited to serve, and another nine percent said they might consider doing so. Foundation Home Area respondents were more likely than rural residents overall to have said they have no interest in such (62% Foundation Home Area, 47% rural Minnesota).

### Why Haven't Served in a Leadership Role



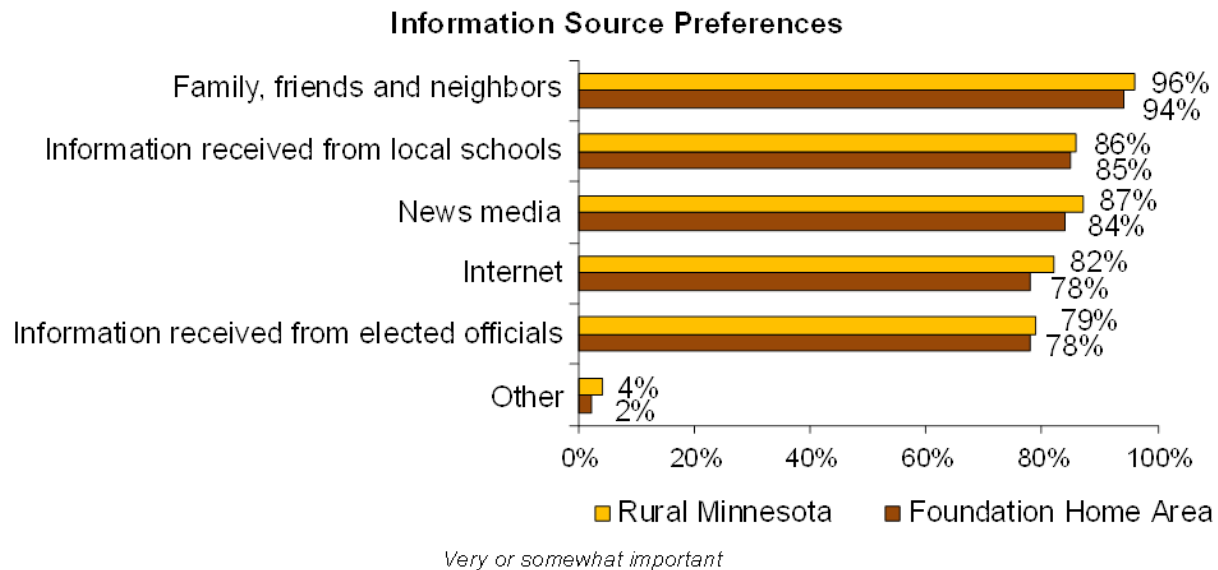
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### If You Have Not Served in a Leadership Role, Would You Consider Doing So If Asked?



## Information Source Preferences

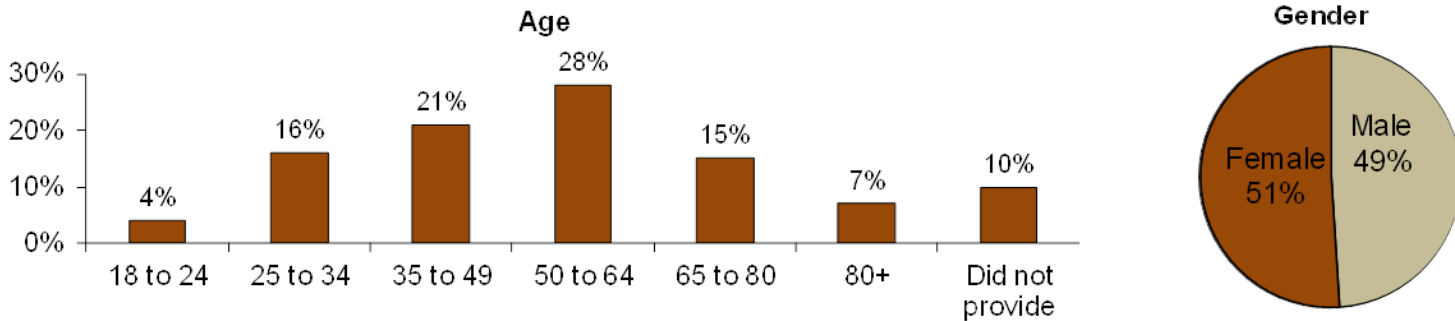
When asked about preferred information sources, Foundation Home Area residents said that they rely heavily on family, friends and neighbors (94%) to keep them updated about their local area. Other top information sources included the information received from local schools (85%), news media (84%), the Internet and information received from elected officials (78% each). Additional sources cited included community gatherings, among others.



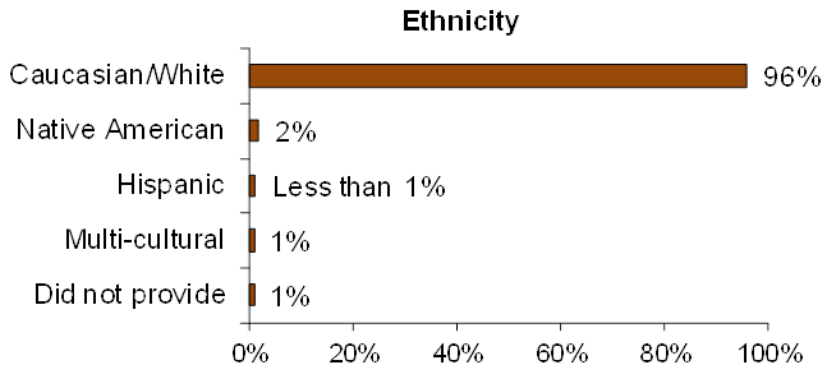
### Demographics

Twenty percent of Foundation Home Area respondents in this study were age 18 to 34, 49 percent were age 35 to 64 and 22 percent were age 65 or older. Ten percent did not provide age information.

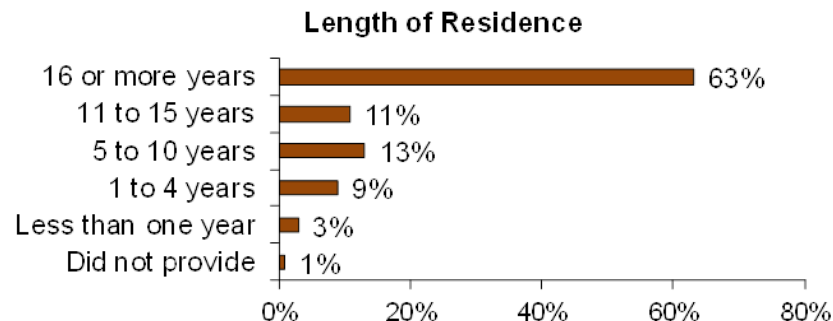
Gender was nearly equally represented, with 51 percent women and 49 percent men. One percent did not note their gender.



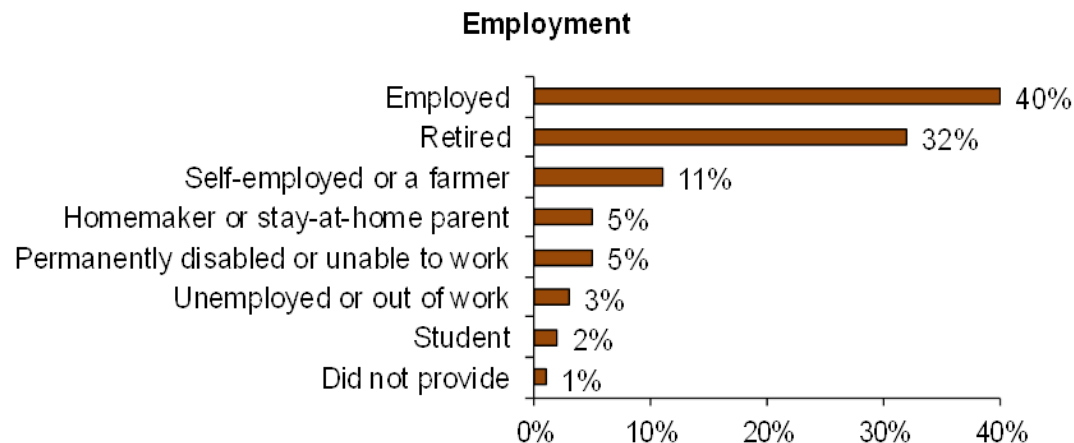
Ninety-six percent of survey participants were Caucasian. Other ethnicities responding included Native American (2%); Hispanic (less than 1%); and one percent said they are multi-cultural. One percent did not provide this information.



Sixty-three percent of respondents in the Foundation Home Area said they have lived in their community for 16 or more years, followed by five to 10 years (13%), 11 to 15 years (11%), one to four years (9%), and less than one year (3%). One percent did not provide this information.

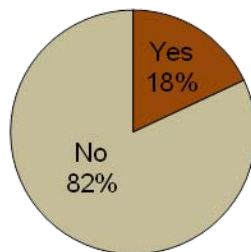


Only about half (51%) said they are employed, with 11 percent of those citing they are either self-employed or a farmer. Of those who said they do not work, 32 percent said they are retired, a homemaker or disabled/unable to work (5% each), unemployed (3%) or a student (2%). One percent did not provide employment information.



Eighteen percent said they own a business of some type.

**Own a Business**



Seventeen percent of Foundation Home Area residents cited their family income as \$20,000 to \$35,000, followed by \$35,001 to \$50,000 (16%), \$75,001 to \$100,000 (15%) or \$50,001 to \$60,000 (11%). Another 11 percent said their household brings in less than \$20,000, followed by \$60,001 to \$75,000 or more than \$100,000 (8% each). Fifteen percent did not provide income information.

Fifty-two percent said the community they live in or are nearest to has a population of 5,000 to 14,999 people. Another 21 percent cited a population size of 500 to 4,999, followed by less than 500 (19%), 15,000 to 24,999 (6%), and 25,000 to 34,999 (1%). Two percent were unsure.

About a third (32%) noted that at least one child 18 years old or younger resides in their household.

